Filmed without your consent

A UK guide for women (and men)

GOOD LAW Project

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About this guide

This guide was produced by Good Law Project. It was last updated on 22 October 2026. If you have any questions or suggestions, please get in touch with Good Law Project via our website.

Disclaimer

This guide does not constitute legal advice and should not be relied on as such. Instead, specialist advice should be sought on your specific circumstances.

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The rise of covert recording

Historically, hidden cameras were relatively easy to identify. Today, devices like Meta Ray-Ban smart glasses are making non-consensual filming harder to spot. By seamlessly embedding microphones, artificial intelligence, and high-definition cameras into ordinary looking glasses, smart glasses allow wearers to record continuously unbeknown to those around them. Many devices display an LED light when they are recording, but some users have worked out a way to disable this feature. As a result, unlike smartphones that require a deliberate pointing motion, these glasses can capture first-person footage instantly and invisibly, fundamentally shifting public privacy dynamics.

This stealth capability has prompted venues like Wetherspoon pubs to ban smart eyewear. Media reports throughout 2026 highlight the severity of the issue:

- **January 2026:** a BBC investigation found women secretly filmed on Meta Ray-Ban glasses and posted to TikTok. One account had posted more than 100 similar videos.[1]
- **May 2026:** the BBC reported on a woman filmed in a London shopping centre. When she asked the man to take the video down, she was told he would only remove it in return for payment.[2]
- **Summer 2026:** Police Scotland began assessing videos a TikToker had secretly filmed of people around Scotland.[3]
- **August 2026:** University of Sydney researchers analysed 350 of these videos on Instagram. In around 43% of cases, the women were then exposed to abuse in the comments, some revealing their personal details.[4]

Further escalating these privacy concerns is the integration of artificial intelligence. A student-developed prototype named I-XRAY showed how real-time facial recognition linked to Meta glasses could instantly identify and dox strangers.

In response to growing backlash, Meta modified its devices in July 2026 so that the camera disables itself if the front recording LED is tampered with. Concurrently, Instagram pledged to delete harassing pickup content, though reporters continued to find such clips months later. By September 2026, the Minister for Women and Equalities clarified to Parliament that misuse can breach existing voyeurism laws,

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[1] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cr7jej2elyyo
[2] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwy87wqz0q9o
[3] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4g369y5k8ko
[4] https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2026/08/11/smart-glasses-pose-new-harassment-risks-for-women-research-meta.html

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emphasising the legal responsibility of social networks to take down non-consensual media.

Your rights at a glance

In the UK, being filmed in public is rarely illegal. However, legal boundaries can be breached once the footage is uploaded, monetized, sexualized, or used to target an individual.

Incident	Legal Status	Recommended Action
Casual recording in public spaces (streets, parks, beaches)	Usually legal. There is no blanket ban on public filming.	Object verbally and request deletion. If persistent or uploaded, proceed with the steps below.
Persistent filming or following	Can constitute stalking or harassment.	Report to the police, contact the National Stalking Helpline, or seek a civil injunction. If uploaded, submit a complaint to the host platform, demand the uploader remove it.
Identifiable, non-consensual footage, published online	Can be unlawful under data protection and privacy regulations, particularly if monetised, engagement-driven, or in a private place. Can also constitute harassment if published to weaponize an online audience against you	Submit a complaint to the host platform, demand the uploader remove it, and alert the ICO. Report to the police if publication has led to harassment

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Incident	Legal Status	Recommended Action
Recorded in an intimate setting (bedroom, changing room, toilet) or during sexual activity	Frequently criminal (e.g., voyeurism).	Report to the police and contact the Revenge Porn Helpline.
Sharing or threatening to leak intimate media	Criminal offense.	Report to the police, and contact the Revenge Porn Helpline and StopNCII.org.
Demanding payment for video removal	Potential blackmail.	Refuse payment, preserve communications, and report to the police.
Doxxing or receiving threatening comments	Platforms are legally obligated to remove illicit content; threats can be criminal.	Report the account and individual comments. Report threats to the police.
Captions spreading damaging lies	Potential defamation.	Consult a legal professional.
Creation or distribution of sexual deepfakes	Both creating and sharing are criminal offences.	Report to the police, and contact the Revenge Porn Helpline and StopNCII.org.

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Understanding UK law on public filming

Capturing hidden footage in public is not inherently illegal in the UK. The legality hinges entirely on the context: the location, whether the person is identifiable, the nature of the recording, and its subsequent use.

- **No universal "image rights":** English law does not provide you with legal ownership of recordings of you. Just being visible in footage does not give you grounds to bring a legal claim.
- **Public privacy is conditional:** Judges evaluate if you had a "reasonable expectation of privacy" and balance this against the videographer's right to free expression. If you were caught in the background of a tourist's vlog in a public place, their rights would likely outweigh yours, but targeted covert recording of a person visiting a hospital, for example, would favour the individual's right to privacy. In addition, filming someone experiencing distress in a public setting can constitute a privacy breach (as established in *Peck v United Kingdom*).
- **Criminal protections for intimate acts:** Secretly capturing footage of someone engaging in intimate activities (undressing, using the restroom, or having sex) is governed by the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019. Capturing images beneath clothing is similarly outlawed. In a landmark January 2026 case, a defendant pleaded guilty to voyeurism after utilizing smart glasses to film a sexual encounter without explicit permission.[5]
- **Venue restrictions:** Private establishments hold the authority to prohibit smart eyewear. Beginning in August 2026, various UK venues, including cinemas and pubs, began banning recording devices and confiscating Meta glasses upon entry.
- **Manufacturer guidelines:** Meta explicitly instructs users to keep the recording LED visible, respect objections, and avoid sensitive areas. Highlighting breaches of these terms of service can bolster your reports to the platform, especially if the front LED is not visible when the recording happened.

[5] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2026/01/09/man-smart-glasses-illegally-record-sex-spared-jail/

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What the law can do once footage is published

Some legal mechanisms come into play, or are stronger, if a video is distributed online, provided you are identifiable and the clip is publicly accessible. Seek legal advice as these claims are complex and expensive.

- **UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR):** Your voice and face are legally recognised as your personal data. Where the video uses personal data GDPR may apply, particularly if monetised or engagement driven. Where it does, the uploader must have a lawful reason to use your data (consent, legitimate interest) and must respect your data rights, which include the right to ask for the video to be deleted and to object to various processing. Posting footage mainly to humiliate or entertain at your expense will be hard to justify. Although you can formally demand deletion, those uploading the content may invoke journalistic or free expression defences to keep it up. If the uploader ignores you, you can escalate the matter to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) or bring a civil claim. While the ICO handles enforcement, only a court can provide compensation.
- **Misuse of private information:** Privacy claims can be made if you are recorded in circumstances where you had a reasonable expectation of privacy, and your privacy right is more important than the publisher's right to free speech. In such cases, you can apply to court for an injunction to stop distribution of a video and seek financial damages. These claims are strongest for targeted covert filming, particularly in private places, and filming of sensitive moments or real distress.
- **Harassment:** The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 criminalises repeated conduct that causes alarm or distress, while also giving rise to civil action. As the conduct has to be repeated, this law does not apply in the cases where there is only a single video recording and publication.
- **Defamation:** If accompanying text or video edits spread malicious lies that damage your reputation, you may be able to pursue a defamation case.
- **Copyright limitations:** Videographers usually hold the copyright in their videos, making copyright takedowns ineffective for victims.
- **Social media regulations and the Online Safety Act:** Platforms must remove illegal material (harassment, intimate images, threats) under the Online Safety Act, overseen by Ofcom. Internally, platforms have varying policies:
    - Meta prohibits "pickup" harassment videos.

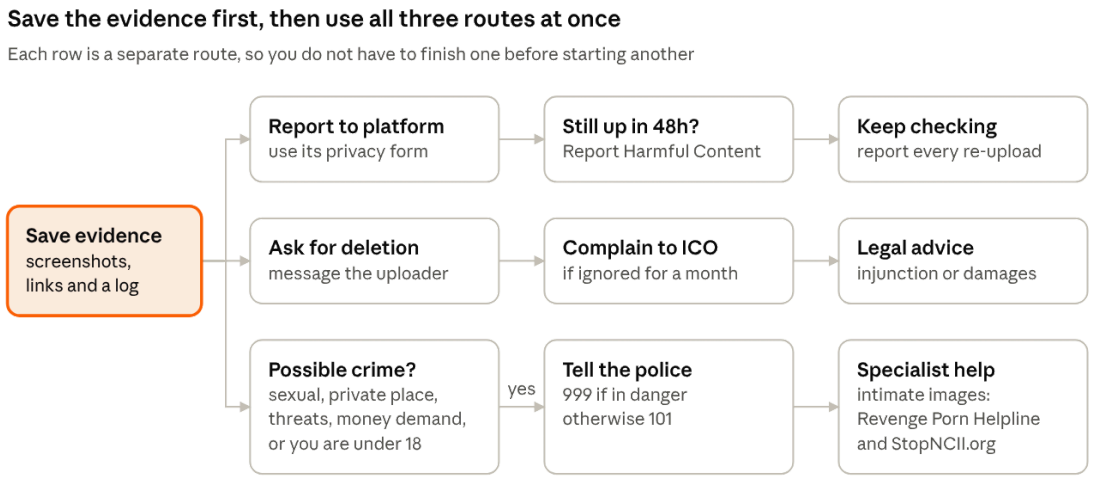
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- TikTok bans sexual harassment.
- YouTube offers a 48-hour privacy review process that shields your identity.

In reality, enforcement is patchy at best. When a journalist sent Meta more than 20 videos, it removed nine, and one account was initially banned then came back with its videos restored.[6] If videos are not removed after making a complaint, keep making reports.

Action plan if you discover yourself online

Save screenshots and copies of video before you report anything, because when a post comes down it may be difficult to prove what happened later. After that, several of these steps can run at the same time.



Start on the left. The top two routes work for any posted video; add the bottom route if a crime may be involved.

- **Prioritise your wellbeing:** Do not interact with the post, as any comments or sharing cause the algorithm to further boost the post. If possible, have a trusted friend manage the reporting process to spare yourself repeated exposure.
- **Preserve the evidence:**
    1. Screenshot or screen-record the video, the account name, the caption, the date and the view count.

[6] https://thenextweb.com/news/meta-glasses-harassment-videos-instagram-algorithm-recommends

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2. Copy the links to the video, the account and any reposts.
3. Capture comments that threaten you, sexualise you or reveal personal details.
4. Write down when and where you were filmed, what the person looked like, what they said and what you said.
5. Keep everything in one log (template below) and store a copy somewhere safe.
6. If the video is intimate, ask the Revenge Porn Helpline how to keep evidence safely.

- **Report to social media:** Report the specific content rather than the account. Reporting an account asks Instagram to assess the account as a whole, which is a high bar; the platform has to weigh the entirety of someone's activity against its policies before it will act on the account level. Reporting individual pieces of content asks it to assess specific material against a specific rule, which is a much more straightforward question and typically reviewed faster.

  Report each offending comment, message, story, and post separately, even if it feels repetitive to do so. A pattern of content reports builds a record against the account that a single account level report does not; reviewers can see exactly what was flagged, when, and under which category, which strengthens any later escalation.

Instagram – How to report a video/post

1. Go to the post/video (remember do not interact, comment or share).
2. Click the three dots (··· on iOS or ⋮ on Android) in the upper right corner.
3. Select **Report.**
4. Choose the most appropriate reason. Select the reason that best fits the situation. For non-consensual content, choose **Bullying or harassment** or **Privacy violation**. If the content is intimate, select **Nudity or sexual activity**.
5. Follow the prompts to submit. Instagram will ask for a few more details to categorise the report.

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TikTok – How to report a video/post

1. Go to the post/video (remember do not interact, comment or share).
2. Access the report menu by long-pressing anywhere on the video while it is playing, or tap the **share arrow** on the right side of the screen.
3. Select **Report.**
4. Choose the violation type. Select the type that best fits the situation. For non-consensual content, choose **Bullying and harassment** or **Privacy/personal information**. If the content is intimate, select **Nudity or sexual activity**.
5. Submit the report.

- **Demand deletion:** If safe to do so, send the creator a formal written request demanding removal under UK data protection laws and/or privacy laws. Never pay a ransom or meet them in person. If extorted for money, contact the police.
- **Complain to the ICO:** If your data deletion request is ignored by both the uploader and the platform, file a complaint with the ICO online or call 0303 123 1113.
- **Report to police when a crime may be involved.** That includes intimate or sexual content, filming somewhere intimate, threats, repeated targeting, stalking or harassment, your address or workplace being revealed, a demand for money, or if you are under 18.
    1. Call 999 in an emergency. Otherwise call 101 or report online.
    2. Give police your evidence and ask for a crime reference number.
    3. Detail matters. In one London case, police could not progress an investigation because there was not enough information.
- **Scrub search engines:** Utilize Google and Bing's data protection removal tools to unlink your name from the video.
- **Lock down your accounts:** Switch social accounts to private, strip out phone numbers and workplaces, and filter aggressive keywords so you cannot see them. Notify your employer if you feel unsafe. Organisations like The Cyber Helpline offer free stalking support.

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- **Get legal advice** if you want a court order, compensation, or to unmask an anonymous account.
- **Monitor for re-uploads:** Videos are often re-uploaded, so check the account and related hashtags and report each copy.

Immediate defence: What to do if you are currently being filmed

You can say no, walk away and get help. You do not owe anyone a conversation or your contact details.

- **Check for indicators:** Meta devices feature a small white LED on the frame that flashes for photos and remains blinking during video capture (though this can be difficult to spot in bright light and easily concealed).
- **Vocalise your refusal:** State firmly, "I do not consent to being recorded. Stop recording and delete it." Meta's user guidelines explicitly mandate stopping if someone objects. Do not otherwise engage.
- **Protect personal data:** Many creators film specifically to capture your social media handles or phone number on audio. Keep this information private.
- **Relocate safely:** If available, move toward security staff or dense crowds. If on managed premises, ask management to log the incident and retain CCTV footage.
- **Document the encounter:** Write a note setting out the individual's appearance, brand names mentioned, the time, and the exact location.
- **Prioritise safety over confrontation:** Do not attempt to chase the individual or snatch the device. If followed or threatened, call 999 immediately.

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